A POETICAL EPISTLE, ON THE ENGLISH POETS.

[PRICE ONE SHILLING.]

3850

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A

POETICAL EPISTLE,

TO

CHRISTOPHER ANSTEY, Esq;

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ON THE

ENGLISH POETS,

CHIEFLY THOSE, WHO HAVE WRITTEN IN BLANK VERSE.

Si sapis, ad numeros exige quidque suos.

LONDON:

Printed for J. WILKIE, in St. Paul's Church-Yard; T. PAYNE, at the Mews-Gate; J. WOODYER, at Cambridge; W. FREDERICK, at Bath; and J. POTE, at Eton.

M.DCC.LXXIII.

A

POETICAL EPISTLE,

TO

CHRISTOPHER ANSTEY, Esq.;

ON THE

ENGLISH POETS,

COMEDY THOSE, WHO HAVE WRITTEN IN BLANK VERSE.

Si lapis, ad nutrices exige quidque tuas.

LONDON:

Printed for J. Wilkie, in St. Paul's Church-Yard; T. Payne, at the Mews-Gate; J. Woodyer, near Catherine-Street, Strand; W. Fenner, at Bath; and J. Todd, at Dublin.

M.DCC.LXXIII.

A POETICAL EPISTLE TO CHRISTOPHER ANSTEY, Esq.

NO, not in rhyme. I hate that iron chain,
Forg'd by the hand of ſome rude Goth, which cramps
The faireſt feather in the Muſe's wing,
And pins her to the ground. Shall the quick thought,
That darts from world to world, and traverſes

The realms of time, and ſpace, all fancy-free,
Check'd in his rapid courſe, obey the call
Of ſome barbarian, who by ſound enſlav'd,
And deaf to manly melody, proclaims,
" No farther ſhalt thou go" ? Pent in his cage
The impriſon'd eagle ſits, and beats his bars ;
His eye is rais'd to heaven. Tho many a moon
Has ſeen him pine in ſad captivity,
Still to the thunderer's throne he longs to bear
The bolt of vengeance ; ſtill he thirſts to dip
His daring pinions in the fount of light.

Go, mark the letter'd ſons of Gallia's clime,
Where critic rules, and cuſtom's tyrant law,
Have fetter'd the free verſe. On the pall'd ear
The drowſy numbers, regularly dull,

Cloſe in ſlow tedious uniſon. Not ſo
The bard of Eden; to the Grecian lyre
He tun'd his verſe; he lov'd the genuine muſe,
That from the top of Athos circled all
The fertile iſlands of the Ægean deep,
Or roam'd o'er fair Ionia's winding ſhore.

Poet of other times, to thee I bow
With lowlieſt reverence. Oft thou tak'ſt my ſoul,
And waftſt it by thy potent harmony
To that empyreal manſion, where thine ear
Caught the ſoft warblings of a Seraph's harp,
What time the nightly viſitant unlock'd
The gates of heaven, and to thy mental ſight
Diſplay'd celeſtial ſcenes. She from thy lyre
With indignation tore the tinkling bells,

And tun'd it to ſublimeſt argument.
Sooner the bird, that uſhering in the ſpring
Strikes the ſame notes with one unvarying pauſe,
Shall vye with Philomel, when ſhe purſues
Her evening ſong thro every winding maze
Of melody, than rhyme ſhall ſooth the ſoul
With muſic ſweet as thine. With vigilant eye,
And cautious ſtep, as fearing to be left,
Thee PHILIPS watches, and with taſte refin'd
Each precept culling from the Mantuan page,
Diſdains the Gothic bond. Silurian wines,
Ennobled by his ſong, no more ſhall yield
To Setin, or the ſtrong Falernian juice,
Beverage of Latian chiefs. Next THOMPSON came:
He, curious bard, examin'd every drop
That gliſtens on the thorn; each leaf ſurvey'd

Which Autumn from the ruſtling foreſt ſhakes,
And mark'd its ſhape, and trac'd in the rude wind
Its eddying motion. Nature in his hand
A pencil, dip'd in her own colours, plac'd,
With which the ever-faithful copyiſt drew
Each feature in proportion juſt. Had Art
But ſoften'd the hard lines, and mellow'd down
The glaring tints, not Mincio's ſelf would roll
A prouder ſtream than Caledonian Tweed.

or boaſt wild Scotia's hills, and pleaſant vales,
One bard of freedom only. While the North
Turns his broad canvaſs, his Siberian fan,
Winnowing the noxious air; while luxury breathes
Delicious odours o'er her treacherous meal;
While labour ſtrings the nerves, and warms the blood;

While ſocial ſympathy diſſolves the ſoul
In pity, or in love, ſhall ARMSTRONG pleaſe.

Sweet is the ſound, when down the ſloping ſide
Of ſome green hill, or on the ſcented herb
Steep'd in Aurora's aromatic dews,
The full-voic'd choir their emulative notes
Tune to the jocund horn. Whoe'er thou art
Whom now on downy couch dull ſloth detains,
Hark to the poet's ſong. Chaſte Dian's bard,
Avonian SOMERVILLE, thro' many a wood,
Down many a craggy ſteep, ſhall hurry on
Thy glowing fancy. He ſhall ſhew thee where
The amphibious otter, where the wily fox
Hides his proſcribed head. Freſh from the chace
Oft ſhall ſome hunter o'er full bowls record

His

His verſe, and with the faithful image fir'd
Exalt his loud-ton'd voice. The ecchoing hall,
Where blaze the roots of elm, or oak, where round
Hang all the ſhaggy trophies of the field,
Shall ring reſponſive to the vocal ſtrain.

Come, AKENSIDE, come with thine Attic urn
Fill'd from Ilyſſus by a Naïd's hand.
Thy harp was tun'd to freedom: ſtrains like thine,
When Aſia's lord bor'd the huge mountain's ſide,
And bridg'd the ſea, to battle rous'd the tribes
Of ancient Greece: the ſons of Cecrops rais'd
Minerva's ægis; Lacedæmon pour'd
Her hardy veterans from their frugal board;
And Thebes ſaw Xerxes ſhake thro' all his tents.

Tell

Tell me, O MASON, will thy liberal ſoul
With tame ſubmiſſion hug the chain, and brook
Barbarian bondage? Shall the Muſe, who led
Thy youthful ſteps thro' every boſky bourn
That ſkirts wide Harewood's foreſt, and before
Thy raptur'd eye rais'd Mona's central oak,
Haunt of the Druids old, implore in vain?
Wilt thou not join, and from her gall'd feet ſhake
The Northern ſhackle? So to every walk
That thro' thy garden weaves its mazy path,
To every opening glade, each odorous ſhrub
That ſcents the horizon round, ſhall ſhe conduct
Her muſing votary: ſo ſhall ſhe unfold
Rude nature poliſh'd, not ſubdued, by art,
Scenes, where thy fancy roves; and all her flowers

Steep in the living fountains of the ſpring,
To wreathe a chaplet for her poet's brow.

Would I could name thee, GRAY! but Ode is thine,
And plaintive Elegy. Not Pindar ſoars
On bolder wing—But hark! what means that bell
At this ſtill hour flow riſing on mine ear?
It is the voice of death †. Even while I write,
Cold icy dew-drops chill thy languid limbs,
And life's ſhort date is out. From theſe high ſpires,
"Theſe antique towers, that crown the watry glade,"
Theſe fields, that ecchoed to thy moral muſe,

---

† This was written at the time of Mr. *Gray*'s death. He was buried at Stoke, about three miles from Eton College.

Warbling in childhood's happieſt hour, accept
This boon; and, O ſweet melancholy bard,
Reſt to thy cares, and mercy to thy ſoul!

Return, my Muſe; thy wild, unfetter'd ſtrains,
Suit not the mournful dirge. Rhyme tunes the pipe
Of querulous *elegy*; 'tis rhyme confines
The lawleſs numbers of the *lyric* ſong.
Who ſhall deny the quick-retorted ſound
To *ſatire*, when with this ſhe points her ſcorn,
Darts her ſharp ſhaft, and whets her venom'd fang?
Pent in the cloſe of ſome ſtrong period ſtands
The victim's blaſted name: The kindred note
Firſt ſtamps it on the ear; then oft recalls
To memory, what were better wrapt at once
In dark oblivion. Still unrivall'd here

POPE

POPE thro his rich dominion reigns alone:
POPE, whoſe immortal ſtrains Thames ecchoes yet
Thro all his winding banks. He ſmooth'd the verſe,
Tun'd its ſoft cadence to the claſſic ear,
And gave to rhyme the dignity of ſong.

* As when the chearful bells ſome wake proclaim,
The village maid loads not her head with gems,
Ruby, or diamond, but from every field
Culls daffadills, and harebells, ſprent with dew,
Her lovelieſt ornaments, in humble ſtile
Let *Paſtoral* appear. Let rhyme ſupply
The majeſty of nobler ſentiment,

---

* Boileau, L'Art Poetique.

Which ill might ſuit the peaſant. GAY felt this;
And baniſh'd from his woods Arcadian ſwains,
And mark'd the manners of the Britiſh hind,
And uncouth dialect. He too could veil
In fable's myſtic garb the form of truth;
And by his ſprightly tale could often draw
The tear of laughter even from the dim eye
Of churliſh Gravity. Nor be forgot
The groteſque mirth of BUTLER's errant Knight,
Nor SWIFT, nor gallant PRIOR. Subjects light,
Swoln by heroic phraſe, like ſome poor ſlave,
Who, rob'd in royal mantle, ſtruts his hour,
Betray their baſe original the more.

Pardon, my ANSTEY, that I name thee laſt,
Tho' laſt, not leaſt in fame. For thee the Muſe

Reſerv'd

Reſerv'd a ſecret ſpot, unknown before,
And ſmiled, and bade thee fix thy banner there;
As erſt Columbus on his new-found world
Diſplay'd the Iberian enſign. Graceful ſit
Thy golden chains, and eaſy flows the rhyme
Spontaneous. While old Bladud's ſceptre guards
His medicinal ſtream, ſhall Simkin raiſe
Loud peals of merriment. Thou too canſt ſoar
To nobler heights, and deck the fragrant earth
" Where generous Ruſſel lies." With thee, my friend,
Oft have I ſtray'd from morn to lateſt eve,
And ſtoln from balmy ſleep the midnight hour
* To court the Latian Muſe. Tho' other cares

* This alludes to a Latin tranſlation of " Gray's Elegy in a Country Church-" yard," written in conjunction with Mr. Anſtey, and printed in 1762.

Tore me from that ſweet ſocial intercourſe,
I cannot but remember how I rov'd
By Camus, ſedgy ſtream, and on the pipe,
The ruſtic pipe *, while yet it breath'd thy lips,
Eſſay'd alternate ſtrains. Accept this verſe,
Pledge of remembrance dear, and faithful love.

---

* —— πνέιει τὰ σὰ χείλεα. MOSCH.

FINIS.